**Step 1.** **Finding the main idea.**

One of the most important things to do is get the main idea of the graph.

First, identify the **main features** of the graph. What is happening? What are the biggest numbers? If it is a ***time*** or ***comparison*** graph, what are the biggest changes? What are the trends?

* In time graphs you have to describe changes over time.
* In comparison graphs you have to compare different items – countries, people, products, places, etc.

The vocabulary for each kind of graph is different:

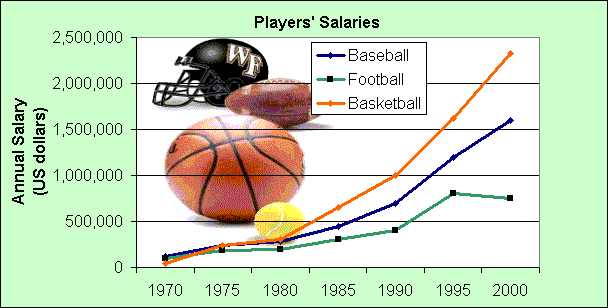
* In time graphs you use time vocabulary to describe change: rose, fell, declined, shot up, increased, remained steady, etc.
* In comparison graphs you compare: twice as much as, more than, less than, the same amount, both X and Y have the same figure, etc.

***Ideally you need to find one main idea and, if possible, one or two more smaller ideas.***

* Don’t have too much information
* Don’t analyze or explain everything in the graph
* Don’t go from left to right, explaining everything. Instead pick the main ideas.
* Use the biggest and next biggest – don’t mention everything in between.
* Don’t mention the small or unimportant stuff
* Pick an idea and find information that supports it

**Have a look at the example!**

Study the graph below. Print it out. Write on it. Circle the important points – beginnings, endings, sudden changes, low points, high points, trends, averages, differences between lines, differences over time.

[](http://writefix.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/sportsmove.gif)

The graph shows US sports players’ salaries in dollars. In 1970, baseballers earned $125,000 a year, footballers’ salaries averaged $99,000 a year, and basketball players earned about $43,000 annually.

**Main ideas**

* All salaries increased
* Big differences between 1970 and 2000 for all sports
* Basketball was biggest in 2000, followed by baseball
* In 1970, basketball was the lowest, baseball was the highest
* There was a sudden rise beginning in 1980
* There was another sharp rise for all sports in 1990
* Salaries in football began to level off or even fall from 1995 onwards

**Step 2. Grouping the information (if needed)**

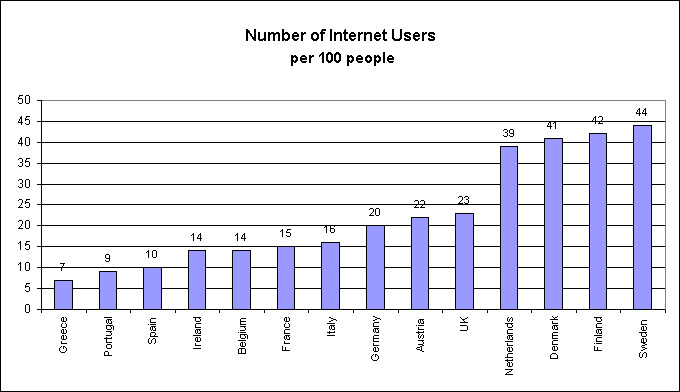
Sometimes there is just too much information in a graph. Don’t describe the X and Y axis. Give the information.

You may need to group information. Grouping information means putting two or three similar or related things together.

This makes it easier for the reader to understand. It is also less work for you, because you can put more than one piece of information in a sentence.

For example, you might be able to divide a list into three groups. Often there is one group at the top, one in the middle, and one at the bottom.

Look at the graph below, which shows the number of Internet users in European countries in 2000.

[](http://writefix.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/internetmark.gif)

**Possible groups could be**

* **Top:**Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, and Denmark **(about 40 users per hundred)**
* **Group 2:**Germany, Austria, UK **(about 20 to 25 users per hundred)**
* **Group 3:**Ireland, Belgium, France and Italy **(14-16 users)**
* **Group 4:**Spain, Portugal, Greece **(less than 10% Internet users)**

**Step 3. Using the proper vocabulary.**

**!!! DO NOT REPEAT THE SAME WORDS!!!**

Your description must be not more than 150 words! Mind it!

#### Movement (Verbs): Up

* Rose
* Went up
* Increased
* Grew
* Shot up
* Surged
* Rocketed

#### Movement (Verbs): Down

* Fell
* Declined
* Dropped
* Decreased
* Sank
* Went down
* Plunged
* Plummeted
* Trailed off

#### Prepositions

* Between 1995 and 2000
* From 1995 to 2000
* Sales rose from 200 to 250
* Sales fell to 150 in March
* Sales fell by 50%

#### Adverbs and intensifiers

* slightly
* a little
* a lot
* sharply
* suddenly
* steeply
* gradually
* gently
* steadily

#### No Movement: (Verbs with Adjectives, Verbs)

* remained steady
* were unchanged
* did not change
* remained constant
* remained stable
* stabilized

#### Tops and Bottoms

* reached a peak
* peaked
* reached their highest level
* fell to a low
* sank to a trough
* reached a bottom

## Example:

## Passengers at a London Underground Station

## http://www.writefix.com/frames/station.gif

The graph shows the **fluctuation**in the number of people at a London underground station over the course of a day.

The busiest time of the day is in the morning. There is a **sharp increase**between 06:00 and 08:00, with 400 people using the station at 8 o’clock. After this the numbers **drop quickly**to less than 200 at 10 o’clock. Between 11 am and 3 pm the number **rises,**with a **plateau** of just under 300 people using the station.

In the afternoon, numbers **decline,** with less than 100 using the station at 4 pm. There is then a **rapid rise** to a **peak** of 380 at 6pm. After 7 pm, numbers fall **significantly,** with only a **slight increase**again at 8pm, tailing off after 9 pm.

Overall, the graph shows that the station is most crowded in the early morning and early evening periods.

## Vocabulary Tips

* Don’t repeat verbs
* Before you start to write, make a list of synonyms (words with the same meaning)
* See how many ways you can rephrase the title of the graph. Use one in the introduction and another in the conclusion with the same meaning.
* Be careful with prepositions. They can make a big difference in meaning. For example, “rose by”is very different from “rose to.” Learn your verbs with the preposition that goes with them.
* Don’t start sentences with **But, So, Also, For, Since, Because, Although**
* Don’t use **“I feel”, “as I have written/said”, “as you can see”,** etc.Keep it academic!

There is some special vocabulary to describe **numbers, fractions and percentages.**

Look at the following table which shows a number in different years (1990-1995) :

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1990** | **1995** |
| 1200 | 1800 |
|  |  |

You could describe the above table using**numbers, fractions** or **percentages:**

* The number went up **by 600**, from 1200 to 800. *(Number)*
* The number went up **by half**, from 1200 to 1800. *(Fraction)*
* The figure went up **by 50%**, from 1200 to 1800. *Percentage)*
* The figure went up 150%, to 1800. (*Percentage)*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1992** | **1994** | **1996** | **1998** |
| 500 | 1000 | 3000 | 12000 |
|  |  |  |  |

Use **“trebled,” “-fold,”**and **“times:”**

* The number **doubled** between 1992 and 1994.
* The number **trebled**between 1994 and 1996.
* The figure **quadrupled**from 1996 to 1998
* There was a **twofold increase**between 1992 and 1994.
* The figure went up **sixfold**between 1992 and 1996.
* The figure in 1996 was **three times** the 1992 figure.
* The figure in 1998 was **four times** the 1996 figure.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1992** | **1994** | **1996** | **1998** |
| 1000 | 800 | 400 | 100 |
|  |  |  |  |

Use **Fractions**:

* Between 1992 and 1994, the figure fell by**one-fifth.**
* Between 1994 and 1996, the number dropped by **a half.**
* The figure in 1998 was **one-tenth** the 1992 total.

**While you Write: Layout**

**Introduction**

* First sentence: Describe the graph. You can use some slightly different words or word forms from those on the question paper, but be careful to give the full information. Start “**The graph shows**“
* Second sentence: This gives the trend or trends. You can put two trends in this sentence or only one – you could keep the other one for the conclusion. Start “Overall, …”

**Paragraph 1: Trend 1**

* Start with **a sentence with no number**. “City size increased sharply over the period.” “The most obvious trend in the graph is that women are having fewer babies.” “Oil production has increased slightly in all the countries in the graph”
* Follow this sentence with an example (**sentence with number**) and perhaps another example (another sentence with number). Keep alternating.

**Paragraph 2: Trend 2**

* Start with **a sentence with no number**. “City size increased sharply over the period.”
* Give an example (**sentence with number**) and perhaps another example (Sentence with number)

**Step 4. Making a conclusion**

* Finish by repeating the main trends, or identify a second trend. Use different vocabulary.
* Don't have any numbers in the conclusion (you could use words like "most", "the majority" "a minority", "a small number").
* **Don’t give your own opinion**.

**Word Length**

Make sure you have 150 words. You should have some short sentences (about 6-10 words) and some long ones (12-18) words, but your average should be about 12 or 13 words per sentence.

A sentence without a number will usually be short. Use a mix - a sentence without a number followed by a sentence or two with a number.